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ABSTRACT

This booklet is one of a series of teacher-written curriculum publications launched by the Bay Area Writing Project, each focusing on a different aspect of the teaching of composition. The basic principles of literary cohesion (the way a text hangs together) are discussed and exercises are suggested to help students increase their sensitivity to and mastery of language. Exercises include the use of disjointed word frames, cloze procedure, context cues, sentence combining, and analyzing text using the cohesive devices of reference, substitution, conjunction, word patterns, and ellipsis. (AEA)

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# Expectation and Cohesion

By

GORDON M. PRADL
New York University

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# Preface

In this publication Gordon Pradl introduces us to some of the basic principles of cohesion and suggests exercises which will help students discover these principles. In additon, Pradl reminds us that "filling the blanks" is not always a passive exercise. In Pradl's cohesion exercises, the student is engaged in making meaning, predicting what is possible based on a self-selected hypothesis.

The Bay Area Writing Project has over the years had a number of scholars who spent sabbatical time with BAWP teachers. Gordon Pradl was with BAWP during 1977-1978, and we are very grateful for his contribution to our thinking.

James Gray, *Director*
*Bay Area Writing Project*
*School of Education*
*University of California, Berkeley*

## INTRODUCTION

"Did you see that car speed through the _____ ?"

If the sentence ended with "sparkplug," "purple," "democracy," or "swimming," we would be surprised. We expect one of a limited number of choices, such as "stop sign" or "red light." Surprises can be meaningful; "a car speeding through democracy" might be metaphorical. But "a car speeding through swimming" is likely to strike us as nonsense.

The point is that efficient communication relies in part on our ability to predict what will come next in a particular discourse. Of course, complete predictability leads to boredom or detachment. But total unpredictability results in gibberish. "Get don't why cut hair _____" could end with any word and would still be meaningless.

As speakers of English we know a lot, unconsciously, about our language, yet generally only unusual circumstances call this knowledge to our attention. To increase our power and facility with language, it can be useful to bring our unconscious structuring strategies into the open. In this way we can learn to control predictive rules and extend them to new and more complex linguistic situations.

# I.

The following exercise creates a disjointed word frame through which students can broaden their linguistic options and become aware of their power to manipulate words to achieve unique meanings.

1. We begin with word associations. Read the 25 words below and write down the word that each brings immediately to mind.

| | |
|---|---|
| 1. technicolor | 1. _____ |
| 2. bullets | 2. _____ |
| 3. nurse | 3. _____ |
| 4. guns | 4. _____ |
| 5. cars | 5. _____ |
| 6. blood | 6. _____ |
| 7. red | 7. _____ |
| 8. paint | 8. _____ |
| 9. dancers | 9. _____ |
| 10. screen | 10. _____ |
| 11. fire | 11. _____ |
| 12. bones | 12. _____ |
| 13. life | 13. _____ |
| 14. hand | 14. _____ |
| 15. home | 15. _____ |
| 16. snow | 16. _____ |
| 17. blue | 17. _____ |
| 18. drifts | 18. _____ |
| 19. corners | 19. _____ |
| 20. white | 20. _____ |
| 21. white | 21. _____ |
| 22. sound | 22. _____ |
| 23. track | 23. _____ |
| 24. dead | 24. _____ |
| 25. trees | 25. _____ |

2. Now use the new list of words to fill the correspondingly numbered slots in the frame below.

It was all _____(1)
from _____(2) to _____(3).
The _____(4) gleamed like _____(5).
and _____(6) was as _____(7)
as the _____(8) on _____(9).
The _____(10) shook with _____(11)
and my _____(12) whistled.
It was like _____(13), but better.

I held my girl's _____(14),
in the deepest parts,
and we walked _____(15) after,
with the _____(16) falling,
but there wasn't much _____(17)
in the _____(18) or _____(19):
just _____(20) and more _____(21)
and the _____(22) _____(23) so _____(24)
you could almost imagine
the _____(25) were talking.

3. After reading through your "poem" and savoring its peculiar qualities, the next step is to revise it. Keep the basic form (two stanzas, of eight lines and ten lines respectively), but you are free to make any other alterations you see as necessary for completing a coherent poetic text. While you are making these changes, be sure to note a specific reason for each one (a noun belongs here, not a verb; or, the theme is winter and the word "surfing" doesn't seem to fit). You will not always be able to come up with a clear reason for a change, but make it anyway. Once you have made all your changes, you will have a new poem that you can share with someone else. Later we will compare it with the original, but first let's see what we can learn from, and how we might use, a sample response to this exercise.

Suppose your list contained the following words:

1. brilliant
2. guns
3. hospital
4. army
5. streets
6. heart
7. stop
8. chips
9. Degas
10. flies
11. camp
12. meal
13. death
14. help
15. hearth
16. white
17. sky
18. wood
19. sharp
20. Frosty
21. blank
22. solid
23. field
24. funeral
25. spring

This would yield the following disjointed frame:

It was all *brilliant*
from *guns* to *hospital.*
The *army* gleamed like *streets*
and *heart* was as *stop*
as the *chips* on *Degas.*
The flies *shook* with *camp*
and my *meal* whistled.
It was like *death,* but better.

I held my girl's *help,*
in the deepest parts,
and we walked *hearth* after,
with the *white* falling,
but there wasn't much *sky*
in the *wood* or *sharp:*
just *Frosty* and more *blank*
and the *solid field* so *funeral*
you could almost imagine
the *spring* were talking.

The disjointed frame appears rather bizarre, but we have a starting point and some phrases that might be suggestive such as "the chips on Degas," or "the solid field so funeral."

One individual's editing strategies led to a poem that begins to make sense to a reader. All the "false starts" have been parenthesized so that we can imagine some of the writing process in action.

It was all (muted) psychedelic
from (dawn) stereo to (dusk) pyrotechnics.
The brass band (leaped) surged forward
like a race horse
breaking from (the) its starting gate.
(as the pastel dancers in a Degas)
The crowd shook with excitement
and my hair (bristled) stood on end.
It was like the fourth of July, but better.

Afterwards, I took my girl,
my arm around her shoulder,
and we (walked) drifted away,
with the stars falling.
There wasn't much sound
(on) in the streets or the (alleys) doorways:
just litter and more litter,
and the evening sky so tranquil
you could almost imagine
the street lamps (were) whispering.

The initial editing attempt involved focusing on "Degas" and his paint chips which suggested the serenity of his dancers poised and "muted." After replacing *guns* and *hospital* with *dawn* and *dusk*, the poem didn't seem to be going anywhere, so the original image of energy and excitement was tried again. This time the picture of a celebration and parade began to take shape, and this governed the subsequent changes in the first stanza. The second stanza appeared to be working in contrast to the first, and so a quieter mood seemed called for. Consequently, changes were made to emphasize the feeling of calm or let-down after the frenzy of the earlier celebration. The couple is left with the day's *litter* and a peace that allows them to draw within themselves.

The particular editing strategy illustrated above involved establishing an image or idea and allowing this to govern the changes, so that the reader is presented with a unified picture. Thus, once a "celebration" and a contrasting "silent" aftermath became the predictive framework within which to judge the word manipulation, a series of changes urged themselves upon the writer.

Rather than working from a guiding image, some students use a localized syntactic strategy. For instance, after reading, "the spring were talking," they might change it to something like, "the spring was talking (babbling)," or "the girls were talking." Such an approach clears up the grammatical confusion, but because it is essentially random with respect to meaning, the sense of the text remains obscure at best.

The poem that inspired this particular exercise is "Reel One" by Adrien Stoutenburg. To round out classroom work on revising, it can be presented to the students as yet another solution to the "disjointed frame" problem. It is helpful to have several oral readings and to discuss the varying meanings (or interpretations) that each reading implies. This allows the students to associate their understanding of a text with how it "sounds"—certainly a necessary skill in monitoring their own writing. Further talk can grow out of which versions are preferred and why. Many students will invent versions that they like better than "Reel One" and this greatly reinforces their confidence in their own creative capacities.

*Reel One*

It was all technicolor
from bullets to nurses.
The guns gleamed like cars
and blood was as red
as the paint on dancers.
The screen shook with fire
and my bones whistled.
It was like life, but better.

I held my girl's hand,
in the deepest parts,

and we walked home, after,
with the snow falling,
but there wasn't much blue
in the drifts or corners:
just white and more white
and the sound track so dead
you could almost imagine
the trees were talking.

10

# II.

The above exercise represents one adaptation of the "Cloze Procedure," which was developed as a way of testing reading comprehension in children. Grounded on the psycholinguistic principle that we are constantly predicting what will come next in a sentence or text on the basis of the clues that we have been storing up as we go along, the "Cloze Procedure" involves presenting the child with a text that has had every fifth word replaced by a blank of equal length and noting the child's ability to supply the missing words.

To get an idea of how this procedure works, try filling in the blanks in the following paragraph from *The Red Pony* by John Steinbeck.

> The high jangling note ___1___ the triangle put the ___2___ Jody in motion. He ___3___ only a little boy, ___4___ years old, with hair ___5___ dusty yellow grass and ___6___ shy polite grey eyes, ___7___ with a mouth that ___8___ when he thought. The ___9___ picked him up out ___10___ sleep. It didn't occur ___11___ him to disobey the ___12___ note. He never had: ___13___ one he knew ever ___14___ . He brushed the tangled ___15___ out of his eyes ___16___ skinned his nightgown off. ___17___ a moment he was ___18___—blue chambray shirt and ___19___ . It was late in ___20___ summer, so of course ___21___ were no shoes to ___22___ with. In the kitchen ___23___ waited until his mother ___24___ from in front of ___25___ sink and went back ___26___ the stove. Then he ___27___ himself and brushed back ___28___ wet hair with his ___29___ . His mother turned sharply ___30___ him as he left ___31___ sink. Jody looked shyly ___32___ .

Supplying the function words (prepositions, articles, conjunctions) is relatively easy—it's the nouns and verbs that pose difficulties. Compare your fill-ins with the actual words Steinbeck used to give yourself a "correctness" percentage (number right divided by 32).

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1. of | 9. triangle | 17. in | 25. the |
| 2. boy | 10. of | 18. dressed | 26. to |
| 3. was | 11. to | 19. overalls | 27. washed |
| 4. ten | 12. harsh | 20. the | 28. his |
| 5. like | 13. no | 21. there | 29. fingers |
| 6. with | 14. had | 22. bother | 30. on |
| 7. and | 15. hair | 23. he | 31. the |
| 8. worked | 16 and | 24. got | 32. away |

There are two approaches to scoring the "Cloze Procedure." The first requires an exact matching of the words in the original text. A correctness rate in the area of 44% means the reading material is in the child's instructional range (i.e. the student can grasp the material with some assistance from the teacher.) A score of 57% or above indicates that the material is appropriate for the child's independent reading.

The second approach to scoring is individually focused. The teacher does not worry about exact word matches, but rather uses the child's responses to diagnose particular language difficulties. For example, if the child answered "pants" or "shorts" for 19, he is obviously on the right track; however, a response such as "green" or "punched" indicates that the child is unable to integrate the meanings of the larger text.

The child's success in the "Cloze" task is a function of his mastery of the predictive system of a given text in particular and of the overall predictive system of English in general. Clearly, this mastery involves both syntactic and semantic knowledge. Thus in a given blank, a verb might be required, and this verb must agree with its subject; on the other hand, the particular verb will depend on the overall theme of the passage. What makes such a test useful is its recognition that all human perception has a natural propensity toward *systematic* closure and that reading as an act of gaining meaning from a text involves the reader in an ongoing process of hypothesis testing. Most of the time our hypotheses are instantly verified or disproved, and like fish in water, we are oblivious to the process. Awareness only arises when the well-oiled machine breaks down and a "mistake" occurs—we don't get from a sentence the meaning we anticipated. Take the following sentence for example:

> The horse raced around the track yesterday.

Reading it quickly, its meaning is straightforward and obvious; but now take the same words embedded in a variant structure:

> The horse raced around the track yesterday and was given a rest today.

Suddenly our original syntactic hypothesis doesn't work (we're now fish out of water). We are forced to reassess the situation and come up with some new structure for the sentence. ("The horse [that was] raced [by someone] around the track yesterday was given a rest today.") In trying to fill in the blanks, children are testing out their own hypotheses regarding how the English language works. By observing the strategies employed, the teacher can gain a clearer picture of the linguistic maturity of the child.

With this general approach in mind, you will have no difficulty inventing your own unique version of the "disjointed frame" exercise. Both poetry and prose passages appropriate for your class could be modified. You might skip the word association step and give your students a text which you have already rendered out-of-joint. Also you might try deleting larger units—phrases, clauses, even whole sentences—to see how this affects your students' predictive capacity.

# III.

Alongside the puzzling texts you create to expand the range of your students' linguistic expectations, you can use existing texts that pose similar interpretation problems because their authors have deliberately violated the conventional rules of language.

"Jabberwocky" is a familiar poem that derives whatever sense it has from our implicit understanding of how words function in a sentence. It begins:

'Twas brillig, and the slithy toves
Did gyre and gimble in the wabe;
All mimsy were the borogoves,
And the mome raths outgrabe...

Have your students examine the cues which indicate whether a "nonsense" word is a noun or a verb (i.e., "wabe" is a noun because it is in an object-of-the-preposition slot). What images are conjured up in their minds by the words "toves," "borogoves," and "raths"? And given that they can identify the contexts which mark these words as nouns, how is it the students know they refer to living creatures? What is a "wabe?" One student may think of a marsh. Alice, on the other hand, claims that "wabe" refers to "the grass plot round a sundial." And so the controversy is joined. The lively arguments that should ensue among your students will provide a basis for exploring the hidden syntactic dimensions of English and how sound associations shape individual responses. Read Humpty Dumpty's explication of "Jabberwocky" in *Through the Looking-Glass*, especially his explanation of portmanteau words: "Well, 'slithy' means 'lithe and slimy.' 'Lithe' is the same as 'active.' You see it's like a portmanteau—there are two meanings packed up into one word."

Lewis Carroll is playing a game with us which only works because he does give us enough information to provide the illusion of an English sentence. Although we are given many made-up words, the passage also contains some of those high frequency building-block words ('twas, and, the, did, in, all, were) which help establish the basic framework for placing all the nouns and verbs, adjectives and adverbs, in our language. Consider what would happen if "and," "the," "did," and so forth, were also nonsense words—all systems would break down and our predictive capacity would be reduced to zero.

E. E. Cummings' poems also expose our underlying linguistic expectations. Initially we are caught off guard as Cummings seems to flout the

conventions of capitalization and punctuation. Next we see that he is toying with our syntactic expectations as well. Suppose we were reading the following lines with our students.

anyone lived in a pretty how town
(with up so floating many bells down)
spring summer autumn winter
he sang his didn't he danced his did

We might begin by having the students fill in the blanks to the frame:

"_____ lived in a pretty _____ town. He sang his _____ . He danced his _____ ."

Then as we look at the poem itself, we can begin to build up an interpretation based in part on the contrast between our ordinary range of linguistic expectations and Cummings' extraordinary dislocations, whether they be naming characters "anyone" and "no one," "someone" and "everyone," or radically combining words into musical refrains such as "with up so floating many bells down."

The question we will be pondering in such an analysis is how Cummings extends our resources of language in order to suggest new universal meanings for everyday occurrences. How, for instance, juxtaposing "spring summer autumn winter" or "sun moon stars rain" flashes instantly before us the cycling of the seasons or the all-surrounding presence of the natural elements. Working in this manner provides our students with yet another approach to reading poetry: the ongoing comparison between our expectations as readers and what the author actually wrote on the page.

The same principles can be used when students are working in response groups with each other's writing. For example, rather than "correcting" a paper according to some abstract principle ("There's not enough concrete detail here"), students might point out the absence of structures that would aid prediction and understanding by the reader ("If you include a more detailed description of the physical limitations of the main character, then at the end of the story we'd have a greater appreciation of the obstacles she had to overcome to win the race.")

# IV.

Frequently we need to construct a context in order to decipher the meaning of a speaker or writer. How many times have we asked the cook after receiving a warning such as, "Careful, the sauce is hot!": "Do you mean *spicy* hot or *hot* hot?" To clear up such common ambiguities, we try to establish the appropriate mind set that matches the intentions of the sender of the message. Because most of the time receivers share a bond of experience with senders, we are unaware of how context-bound our language is. However, when we are the outsider who is ignorant of the topic of the message and to what or whom all the pronouns are referring, we can immediately appreciate the difficulties involved in creating or recreating a semantic context.

Consider for a moment what your reactions would be if you overheard the following conversation:

*Wife:* Clarence was at Margie's today.
*Husband:* I hear they're back together again.
*Wife:* She said she's ready to deliver tomorrow.
*Husband:* What about the corner for the canterbury?
*Wife:* Right. That's a relief as Sandy's expecting any day now.
*Husband:* Make sure you're home in time.

What on earth is going on here? Our first approximation of a gloss might be something like this:

*Wife:* I saw Clarence at Margie's house today (meaning I was visiting Margie too).
*Husband:* I understand that they (Clarence and Margie) are living together again (presumably they had separated for some reason).
*Wife:* She (Margie) said she (Margie) is ready to deliver tomorrow (a baby?).
*Husband:* What about the corner for the canterbury? (What's a canterbury? And why is the husband all of a sudden concerned about where to place it?).
*Wife:* Right. (Is the wife talking about the placement of the canterbury or about Clarence and Margie being back together again?) That's a relief (the canterbury placement or the reconciliation?) as Sandy's expecting any day now. (Wasn't Margie going to

have the baby? Who is this Sandy popping into the conversation?)

*Husband:* Make sure you (the wife) are home in time. (Home for what? Surely not the delivery of the baby.)

Clearly our interpretation doesn't work because it fails to hang together consistently. What we need are more keys to unlock the meanings of this communication between the wife and husband.

To begin with, knowing that a "canterbury" is a magazine rack allows us to establish that the wife has purchased a piece of furniture and that the piece will be delivered tomorrow. With this interpretation the remaining confusion is quickly sorted out, assuming "Margie's" refers to a small antique shop. Thus we see that our difficulty in understanding this conversation was in part a result of our inability to imagine two topics being discussed simultaneously. The wife's opening sentence really gives us two topic indicators: (1) Clarence and his affairs and (2) the wife's visit to the antique store. Subsequent exchanges between the husband and wife mix the two topics. The husband's first remark refers to topic one while his next two remarks refer to topic two. The wife's second remark refers to topic two, with "she" indicating "Margie" who is the owner of the antique shop. On the other hand, the wife's third remark splits in two directions: "Right" refers to topic two, while "That's a relief..." refers back to topic one, and we now learn that Sandy is the woman (wife) Clarence is living with once again. At last the meaning is clear!

Snatches of similar problematic dialogue may be presented to your students in transcript form, or better yet you can make up audio-tapes with actual characters speaking. In deciphering these messages, three points should be stressed.

(1) What background of shared experience is necessary to make sense of a dialogue? Have you ever joined a conversation already in progress where some of your friends are discussing what has been happening to their favorite characters on the afternoon soaps? Until you get your bearings, you surmise that real persons you *ought* to know about are being referred to, and you can't understand why none of the talk makes sense. In our example, both the husband and wife knew that "Margie's" was the antique shop where the canterbury had been purchased, so everything is clear to them.

(2) What pronoun references need sorting out? Because we first supposed "they" linked Clarence and Margie together, we were thrown off the track.

(3) What special vocabulary makes a passage obscure? Frequently a dialogue contains a vocabulary which is specific to an *occupation* (I always feel so helpless going into a hardware store and asking for a "thingamajig," waving my hands with much expression), to an *academic discipline* (Who

knows what we as educators mean when we talk about "exceptional children?") or to a *geographical region* ("More kids have been using the *bubbler* since the *tonic* machine was outlawed."—Boston speech for "drinking fountain" and "sodapop"). In the dialogue in question, "canterbury" is a term that probably would only be recognized by an antiques specialist. This fact alone gives us more information as to the interests of the wife and husband we have been "eavesdropping" on. Similarly, if "Margie's" had been "Montgomery Ward's" we would have had a different frame of reference from the very beginning of the conversation.

The point of such an inquiry is to help students conceptualize the difficulties in writing for an audience which doesn't share the same background information that the writer does. The three points mentioned above should provide a checklist that can help students learn to be sensitive to the kind of reading task that is involved in deciphering the meanings and intentions of their written papers. Let's say that Ms. Crews, the principal of the school, is mentioned in a paper. If the audience of the paper only includes students and teachers of the school, Ms. Crews' name alone may provide an adequate reference. However, for readers outside of this shared environment additional information may be needed (i.e., Ms. Crews is the school principal, and students think thus and so about her.)

In raising such questions for our students, we are trying to avoid arbitrary rules or standards. The reason for "elaborating" information in a specific context is not merely to satisfy the whims of a teacher, but rather to get the whole message across while trying to be as accurate and as non-redundant as possible.

Frame of reference problems have been exploited by psychologists in various context-perception experiments. Take for instance the sentence: "The haystack was important because the cloth ripped." Without context how are we to join the haystack and the ripped piece of cloth meaningfully? The mystery is immediately cleared up when we mention parachuting: "My chute ripped, but thank God for the haystack in the middle of the farmer's field."

Other sentences you might try with your students include:

1. The notes were sour because the seams split.
2. The course was changed because of the front.
3. Driving is impossible without a horse.
4. The boy missed the test because his hands were stuck.
5. The basement was flooded because the sheet melted.
6. The silence was apparent as the yarn was being spun.
7. The coat wasn't finished because the tension was too great.

In each instance the puzzle is solved by finding the appropriate narrative or conceptual context. Clues to interpreting the above sentences might be:

1. a bagpipe, or a fat singer
2. direction of travel, or classroom session; and bad weather
3. a cattle drive
4. his watch stopped
5. a sheet of ice?
6. a quiet audience, and a good story
7. the tightness of the stitch on the sewing machine

How do students interpret the following paragraph, and what clues do they use to arrive at their interpretations?

> Every Saturday night, four good friends get together. When Jerry, Mike, and Pat arrived, Karen was sitting in her living room writing some notes. She quickly gathered the cards and stood up to greet her friends at the door. They followed her into the living room, but as usual, they couldn't agree on exactly what to play. Jerry eventually took a stand and set things up. Finally, they began to play. Karen's recorder filled the room with soft and pleasant music. Early in the evening, Mike noticed Pat's hand and the many diamonds. As the night progressed, the tempo of play increased. Finally, a lull in the activities occurred. Taking advantage of this, Jerry pondered the arrangement in front of him. Mike interrupted Jerry's reverie and said, "Let's hear the score." They listened carefully and commented on their performance. When the comments were all heard, exhausted but happy, Karen's friends went home.

Do they see an evening of cards or a rehearsal of a woodwind ensemble? And how firmly do they get locked in to one side of the ambiguity or the other? After playing with such sentences and passages you might wish to extend this "context" sensitivity training by using sentences from your student's own papers. When a student's message "fails" because of insufficient or ambiguous information, it is now possible to use the class as audience in order to encourage the needed expansion of the composition's frame of reference.

The kinds of *meaning* problems we have been considering, in part fall under the area of what linguists refer to as Speech Act Theory. To fully understand a speech act, two requirements must be satisfied. First, we must know the plain sense of the actual language contained in the speech act. But just deciphering the dictionary meaning of words will not reveal the real significance of the utterance. We must know something about the second component of the speech act, namely the speaker's intentions. It is the speaker's intentions that allow his/her utterances to be contextualized.

Consider, for example, the following indirect speech act. When I say, "It's cold in here," my intention may be to bring about some action on the part of my listener(s). "It's cold in here" might be translated, "Close the window/door." Then my assertion is not an existential statement about the

temperature, but rather is a veiled command which I hope will be responded to by, "Let me close the window/door," or "Should I turn up the heat?" or "Do you want me to get you another blanket?"—not by "Yes, it certainly is cold in here!" The response I will get depends on physical and social factors. At least two conditions must be met in order for my command to be taken seriously.

First, some course of action must actually be possible. In other words, a window or door is open and can be closed, or a thermostat can be turned up or a blanket or sweater can be fetched. And further, the hearer must generally share the speaker's analysis of the cold temperature so that a response like, "Well, I'm roasting!" doesn't short circuit the speaker's command (of course "roasting" might have ironic intent).

Second, certain social conventions of appropriateness must be met. If the speaker and hearer are equals, or the speaker is of higher status, the indirect command will no doubt be attended to. However, imagine the same declarative, "It's cold in here," spoken by a Private to a General—impossible, unless some humorous intentions are at play.

When these two conditions are met, the message works. But when indirect speech acts are problematic, they call attention to underlying rules that have been violated. By exploring such violations with our students, we can increase their abilities to contextualize their own utterances.

You might, for example, examine a series of isolated sentences with your students to see how they understand them on the basis of their knowledge of the world and its social conventions. What "speech act" sense will your students make of the following Speaker A assertions made to an as-yet-unknown speaker/hearer B?

1. "The bus has arrived."
2. "The fire is almost out." (cf. in the fireplace vs. the house is burning down.)
3. "You're stepping on my foot."
4. "Your watch will be ready on Tuesday."
5. "The faucet is leaking again."
6. "There's a good movie opening on Friday."

As your students begin to supply both appropriate and inappropriate (the basis for humor) responses that a Speaker B might utter, you will be able to explore the range of social "scripts" that exist in their heads, and that make communication possible. Consider the variant dramas conjured up when "Fix it yourself!" is the reply to assertion 5, or "I told you I don't want to go out with you anymore!" is the response to assertion six. In each case the student must create a context, for words in isolation never convey our full intentions. And the contexts they supply will emerge directly out of their predictive maps of human behavior. For instance, assertion six might tap the rules for dating rituals: who asks whom, how, and under what circumstances? What variations on this general boy-girl theme are possible before humor raises its mischievous head?

The point is that we always bring prior knowledge to every language game, just as we expect our listener(s)/reader(s) to. Yet when we take this knowledge for granted, it is easy for a message to misfire. In working with your students on disembedded sentences, you can raise directly the larger question: "How is it we understand any message in the first place?" You will be able to go on to incorporate some of the conclusions (such as, some assumptions and experiences must be shared by speaker and hearer) into your comments on the compositions students write in your class.

Another way to underline the necessity of context is by using a *stress* exercise with your students. Take the sentence, "Joan read a long poem." Depending upon which word receives the main stress—"Joan" "read," "long," or "poem"—this utterance can have a variety of meanings.

1. It was *Joan*, not Sally, who read a long poem.
2. What Joan did was *read*, not write, a long poem.
3. Joan read a *long*, not a short, poem.
4. Joan read a long *poem*, not a long novel.

The stress in our voice supplies the context that enables the hearer to decipher our intended meaning or emphasis. And just as you did with the indirect speech act sentences, you can ask your students to make up their own *stress* sentences to see if others in the class can guess intentions on the basis of the oral rendering. Such work on language with your students serves to provide a social context for your critical reading of their compositions. These exercises indicate the problems readers (including teachers) have in gleaning the intentions of writers (including students), and what strategies of elaboration writers have at their disposal to insure that the message is actually conveyed to the reader.

In working on "context" and "disjointed language frame" activities, it is advisable to vary the group working arrangements within your classroom so that students will experience diverse responses to their ideas and not simply have to face you as the sole judge and arbitrator. For instance, with the "Reel One" exercise, you could begin by making the assignment to the entire class. After each student has filled in the blanks, you might have some of the disjointed "poems" shared with the class before asking the students to go on to revise them. After some new versions have been created, you might break the class into groups of threes or fours. In these small groups, the students can share their completed poems while engaging in an analysis of the decisions that governed their editorial changes. Later, each group might report to the whole class its findings on the reader/writer's system of expectations, and you can list on the blackboard the general revising strategies that appear. Such a sequence of work might engage two periods of class time depending upon how far you wanted to push the analysis of the revising process.

Pair groupings will frequently heighten student involvement in the "context" activities. For example, after the students generate some sentences for the "stress" exercise, they can try them out orally on their

partners to see if they can convey their intentions through speech. In this way, more students can participate at once, and you can roam the room checking on progress, encouraging students to note those sentences of particular interest which later can be shared with the large group. Similarly, students can work in pairs or small groups improvising brief skits that contextualize the indirect speech act one-liners.

Group work can take a variety of forms. You might stage a competition among groups to see who can brainstorm the greatest number of possible contexts for an *utterance*. Or one group could make up various *utterances* which, in turn, are passed on to a second group who try to disambiguate them. You might even suggest that students compile one-liners that characterize the shared idiosyncratic experience of the class and see whether outsiders can crack your code and supply a meaningful context. In all instances, you must facilitate the active involvement of each student in order to insure as rich a range of responses as possible. As students bring their tacit knowledge of both linguistic and social conventions into the open, you can use the "uncovered" knowledge in comments on their writing, paying special attention to questions of audience and purpose (context).

# V.

Another activity for encouraging a student's sensitivity to how a text hangs together is a modification of "sentence combining." In "sentence combining" you are given two or more simple sentences—building blocks—and the task is to join them together through a series of *embeddings* into one, more complex sentence. For example, let's say you have the following sentences to work with:

1. He borrowed an umbrella.
2. The umbrella belonged to his friend.
3. His friend was named Agnes.
4. He opened the umbrella.
5. The umbrella had two holes in it.
6. The holes were large.

All of these short sentences can lead to one longer sentence: "Upon opening the umbrella he had borrowed from his friend Agnes, he discovered that there were two large holes in it."

The purpose of sentence combining is not simply to produce more "difficult" convoluted sentences—though clearly some practice in it does result in a student producing a higher frequency of more syntactically mature sentences. Rather, the purpose is to encourage subordination and modification, which in turn relates to how our ideas and perceptions are hierarchically arranged. Taking the six simple (kernel) sentences serially gives a simple narrative, totally lacking in design or focus. In the combined sentence, however, we have a deliberate focus on "he discovered" that was only implied in sentences four and five as they were listed above.

It is important to remember that you are not looking for a "right" answer. You are looking for expressions of slightly different communication intentions.

Sentence combining is always best tied to larger texts, or the students' own work, instead of to randomly conceived and contextless workbook exercises. The following activity will illustrate how sentence combining can be related to various issues regarding a larger text, such as how an author's meaning is conveyed through deliberate stylistic choices.

Begin by reading the thirty-five sentences below. How would you characterize the relationship among these sentences? Why do they seem to plod along in an uninteresting, choppy manner?

1. Day had broken.
2. It was cold.
3. It was gray.
4. It was exceedingly cold.
5. It was exceedingly gray.
6. The man turned aside from the Yukon trail.
7. It was the main Yukon trail.
8. He climbed the earthbank.
9. The earthbank was high.
10. There a trail led eastward.
11. The trail was dim.
12. The trail was little-travelled.
13. The trail led through the timber-land.
14. The timber-land contained fat spruce.
15. It was a steep bank.
16. He paused for breath at the top.
17. He excused the act to himself.
18. This he did by looking at his watch.
19. It was nine o'clock.
20. There was no sun.
21. There was no hint of sun.
22. There was not a cloud in the sky.
23. It was a clear day.
24. An intangible pall seemed over the face of things.
25. A gloom made the day dark.
26. The gloom was subtle.
27. It was due to the absence of the sun.
28. This fact did not worry the man.
29. He was used to the lack of sun.
30. He had not seen the sun for days.
31. He knew a few more days must pass.
32. Then the orb would peep above the sky line.
33. The orb would be cheerful.
34. It would come from due south.
35. It would dip immediately from view.

Now combine these thirty-five kernel sentences into a paragraph which better expresses what you take to be the essence of the passage. When you have completed your version, try to state the specific strategies you used to make long sentences out of short ones. Why did you choose to subordinate one kernel sentence to a second kernel sentence? Now compare your version with the version that follows:

> Day had broken. It was cold and gray, exceedingly cold, exceedingly gray. The man turned aside from the main Yukon trail and climbed the high earthbank. There a dim little-traveled trail

led eastward through a timber-land full of fat spruce. It being a steep bank, he paused for breath at the top, excusing the act to himself by looking at his watch. It was nine o'clock. There was no sun or hint of sun. Although it was a clear day without a cloud in the sky, an intangible pall seemed over the face of things. A subtle gloom made the day dark. It was due to the absence of the sun, yet this fact did not worry the man for he had not seen the sun for days. He knew a few more days must pass before the orb would peep above the sky line. The orb would be cheerful. It would come from due south, but would dip immediately from view.

Which version do you like better and why? Which version ends up with fewer sentences, and what effect does this have on a reader? Look at variant combining strategies. For instance, the version here combined kernels 22, 23, and 24 into "Although it was a clear day without a cloud in the sky, an intangible pall seemed over the face of things." What did you do with kernels 22, 23, and 24? What's the difference between the two versions in terms of style and meaning (intention)? If students work in pairs or small groups analyzing their variant versions, your task will be to keep them focused on how and why they combined the kernel sentences in the way they did.

Now let's examine the original version:

Day had broken cold and gray, exceedingly cold and gray, when the man turned aside from the main Yukon trail and climbed the high earthbank, where a dim and little-traveled trail led eastward through the fat spruce timberland. It was a steep bank, and he paused for breath at the top, excusing the act to himself by looking at his watch. It was nine o'clock. There was no sun nor hint of sun, though there was not a cloud in the sky. It was a clear day, and yet there seemed an intangible pall over the face of things, a subtle gloom that made the day dark, and that was due to the absence of sun. This fact did not worry the man. He was used to the lack of sun. It had been days since he had seen the sun, and he knew that a few more days must pass before that cheerful orb, due south, would just peep above the sky line and dip immediately from view.

By this time you have probably recognized the passage as the opening paragraph of Jack London's short story, "To Build a Fire." How does it differ from your version and the version above? How, for instance, does it combine kernels 22, 23, and 24? Does this have a different effect on the reader's understanding and feelings? Now the three-ring circus begins, because the students, having analyzed and defended their own versions, have become committed to them. In every class in which I have tried this

exercise, at least half the students felt their "text" created a more cohesive mood than London's does. The arguments serve to sharpen the students' awareness of stylistic choices and of how sentences hang together to create a unified whole.

Using this general approach with other texts (selected paragraphs from other short stories, novels, and essays that you might be reading with your students) is one way of demystifying literature for your students. In each instance an author has made a particular selection to solve a particular problem, but there are no absolute solutions. Sentence combining is one way of getting your student to "mess around" with alternate rhetorical strategies.

Another approach is to have students work collectively, in small groups, or individually, at analyzing a passage into its building block units to see what the author began with and how the parts are related to the whole. Similarly, such a "breaking-up" strategy can be applied to the students' own papers especially when their sentences have become mazes. Getting students back to their basic building blocks can aid them to clarify their aims and identify strategies they might use to improve the ordering and logic of their written ideas.

Along with the above activities, you might consider how students go about sorting through scrambled paragraphs which you can make up, like the following:

> "Now Jane is recuperating at home. Her mother called the doctor, who sent an ambulance to their house. But she should be back in school in time for the awards ceremony. Jane was rushed to the hospital where the doctor performed an emergency appendectomy on her. Last Friday, Jane woke up with a severe stomach ache."

Students who have developed a conscious sense of narrative organization will understand how and why to re-order such a paragraph:

> "Last Friday, Jane woke up with a severe stomach ache. Her mother called the doctor, who sent an ambulance to their house. Jane was rushed to the hospital where the doctor performed an emergency appendectomy on her. Now Jane is recuperating at home. But she should be back at school in time for the awards ceremony."

As you work through such exercises with your students, they will become increasingly aware of the linguistic devices that go into writing a coherent unit of text.

# VI.

Thus far, I have discussed expectations that arise from subject-matter and chronology (cars speed through red lights; Jane's appendectomy precedes her recuperation.) We also have semantic linking devices by which we can *create* expectations.

Linguists define *cohesion* as "the means whereby elements that are structurally unrelated to one another (i.e. do not share some structural connection such as would exist between the subject and the predicate of a sentence) are linked together, through the dependence of one on the other for its interpretation" (Halliday, 1976). Halliday classifies cohesion relations into five types. Reference, substitution, ellipsis, conjunction and lexical cohesion distinguish a "text" from a disconnected sequence of sentences. An abbreviated outline of Halliday's five cohesive devices appears below with illustrating sentences.

I. *Reference* (each item is a directive which indicates that information is to be retrieved from elsewhere.)
   A. *Personal* (pronouns relating to persons: I, she, they, theirs, one, etc.)
      "*Three blind mice, three blind mice./* See how *they* run!
      See how *they* run!"
   B. *Demonstrative* (reference by means of location, and on a scale of proximity: the, this, that, these, those, here, now, there, then, etc.)
      "Doctor Foster went to *Gloucester* in a shower of rain. He stepped in a puddle right up to his middle and never went *there* again."
   C. *Comparative* (indirect reference by means of identity, similarity, or difference: same, differently, so, more, better, equally, etc.)
      "There were two *wrens* upon a tree.
      *Another* came, and there were three."

II. *Substitution* (replacement of one item with another.)
   A. *Nominal* (one/ones, same, etc.)
      "Jerry's *pants* are getting worn. He could use some new *ones.*"
   B. *Verbal* (do, be, do so, be that, etc.)
      "Alice *cried.* Mary *did* too."

C. *C. usal* (so, not, etc.)
"Is the fire out? I believe *so.* (i.e. *that the fire is out)*"

III. *Ellipsis* (the omission of an item)
A. *Nominal* (any part of a nominal phrase.)
"I think I've seen every painting in this museum. Unfortunately, a lot *(of the paintings)* are not on view today."
B. *Verbal* (a lexical, main verb and/or additional auxiliary verb elements.)
"The picture was not finished. If it had been *(finished),* I could have sold it."
C. *Clausal* (all or any part of a clause)
"John was very disappointed with the response to his new book. You can ask him *(whether he was or not).*"

IV. *Conjunction* (the specification of the way in which what is to follow is systematically connected to what has gone before.)
A. *Additive* (and, also, in addition, likewise, etc.)
B. *Adversative* (yet, though, in fact, instead, at any rate, etc.)
C. *Causal* (so, consequently, it follows, in this respect, etc.)
D. *Temporal* (then, next, before that, at once, secondly, up to now, etc.)
"For the whole day he climbed up the steep mountainside, almost without stopping. And in all this time, he met no one. (additive) Yet he was hardly aware of being tired. (adversative) So, by night time the valley was far below him. (causal) Then, as dusk fell, he sat down to rest. (temporal)"
E. *Continuatives* (now, of course, well, anyway, surely, after all)
"You needn't apologize. *After all,* nobody could have known what would happen."

V. *Lexical* (word patterns)
A. *Reiteration* (repetition of a lexical item)
1. *Same item:* "There was a large *spider* sitting beside Alice. The *spider* slowly inched closer to her."
2. *Synonym or near-synonym:* "There's a *boy* climbing that tree. The lad's going to fall if he doesn't watch out."
3. *Superordinate term:* "Henry's bought himself a new *Jaguar.* He practically lives in the *car.*"
4. *General item* (thing, people, place, idea, etc.): "Jill loves her *new fur coat.* You can't get the thing off her back."
B. *Collocation* (association of lexical items that regularly co-occur.)
"Martha likes to do the *repairs* on her *car* herself. She says an

*oil change* and a *tune-up* are easy, but she did have some problems the first time she tried to *reline* her *front brakes*. Yet she even mastered that and now is ready to tackle her *leaky transmission.*"

Although the sublisting and examples in the above outline are far from exhaustive, they should be suggestive of the range of text-making strategies that we have at our command. Taken in combination, they provide us with a more precise answer to the question, "How is it a reader knows that two or more sentences belong together, and thus cohere to form a unit of text?" But to make this clearer, we need to look at some actual texts.

Consider the following paragraph. Referring back to the list of cohesive devices, make a note of each of the rhetorical signals which establish relationships among the various elements from sentence to sentence.

> (1) Newt Winger lay belly-flat at the edge of the cornfield, his brown chin close to the ground, his eyes glued to a hill of busy ants. (2) He singled out one struggling with treebark twice its size, tugging it forward then sideways then backward up the incline. (3) Being a veteran ant-watcher, Newt tracked its course near perfect over the rough and slippery terrain. (Opening paragraph from *The Learning Tree* by Gordon Parks.)

A cohesion analysis might look something like this:

Sentence One:
1. "his" twice refers back to Newt Winger (personal reference)
2. *was* left out between "chin" and "close"
   *were* left out between "eyes" and "glued" (verbal ellipsis)
3. "lay belly-flat" leads us to expect "chin close to the ground" (collocation)

Sentence Two:
1. "he" refers back to "Newt" (S1)
   "its" refers back to "one"
   "it" refers back to "treebark" (personal reference)
2. "one" refers back to "ants" (S1) (nominal substitutes)
3. "struggling" belongs with "tugging"
   "forward," "sideways," and "backward" go together in terms of direction
   Also, we would expect "up the incline" on the basis of the "struggling" and "tugging" (collocation)
4. "then," "then" (temporal conjunction)
5. *who was* is left out before "struggling" and "tugging" (nominal, verbal ellipsis)

Sentence Three:
1. "Newt" refers back to "Newt" (S1) (lexical, same item)

2. "its" refers back to "one" (S2) (personal reference)
3. "tracked" relates back to "eyes glued" (S1) and "ant-watcher," "rough," and "slippery" fit with "struggling" and "tugging" (S2) (collocation)

Such a cohesion analysis demonstrates why Gordon Parks's three sentences hang together as tightly as they do. Of course, they are all focused on one event which concentrates readers' expectations, but even in this short example, we have all five cohesive devices represented.

Now let's try cohesion analysis on a piece of non-fiction prose.

(1) Wealth is not without its advantages and the case to the contrary, although it has often been made, has never proved widely persuasive. (2) But, beyond doubt, wealth is the relentless enemy of understanding. (3) The poor man has always a precise view of his problem and its remedy: he hasn't enough and he needs more. (4) The rich man can assume or imagine a much greater variety of ills and he will be correspondingly less certain of their remedy. (5) Also, until he learns to live with his wealth, he will have a well-observed tendency to put it to the wrong purposes or otherwise to make himself foolish.

(6) As with individuals so with nations...
(Opening of Galbraith's *The Affluent Society)*

You should now be able to supply your own detailed analysis, but at least two points are of interest regarding this passage.

First, collocation plays an important role. "Wealth," of course, dominates the passage. Indeed, it even sweeps the word "money" (one *possible* ellipsis after "enough" and "more" in sentence three) before our eyes without even mentioning it directly. "Understanding," is a more subtle thread that ties this passage together. The word relates forward to "precise view," "problem and its remedy," "assume or imagine," "less certain," "learns," "wrong purposes," and "foolish"—quite a feat!

Second, we have a dramatic and effective example of clausal substitution in sentence six. By beginning his second paragraph with "As with individuals so with nations," Galbraith forces us to return to the main drift of the first: "It takes time to learn what are the right things to do with wealth, and when we first gain wealth we often do the wrong or foolish thing." The tight chain created by the "as" and "so" gives us direct evidence that here we are in the hands of a masterful writer.

By comparison, the following paragraph, written by a ninth-grade student, doesn't fare well. Although a number of things can be said about why the performance doesn't work, try concentrating your attention on the paragraph's cohesive devices. Are all the references clear? Is there sufficient *variety* among the cohesion strategies? Also note that in the

example the student has been supplied with the beginning "thesis statement."

> (1) The doctors tell us that daily exercise is important to good health. (2) Some reasons for this are that exercise is good for your body. (3) It helps you stay in shape. (4) It makes you look much younger than you are. (5) It also makes your body function better and it gives you a lot of energy to do things you weren't able to do before. (6) And it makes you form much bigger muscles. (7) Exercise is one thing that we should all do every day of our lives because it's strengthening for us. (8) Do you exercise every day? (9) You should. (10) Afterwards, it pays. (11) Begin today. (12) Throw away your old pictures. (13) After that, you can enjoy your new ones with big muscles and the healthy appearance.

Sentences two through six, with their repetitive use of "it," are merely spinning out a list of reasons for "daily exercise." The use of lexical reiteration in sentence seven, "exercise," appears to bring an end to this chain and in fact the paragraph breaks at this point. This break is marked by the change in reference of "you." In sentence seven, the student begins a shift from "you" referring to a generalized everyone (try substituting "one" for "you(r)" in sentences two through six) to "you" referring directly to the reader/listener being addressed. Significantly, sentence seven contains "we" which is a signal that something strange is occurring, or that the writer has lost control of her material. But now that the student has reached sentence eight, gotten the burden of the teacher's assignment off her back, and found a unique point of view, her prose becomes livelier, and this continues to the end of the paragraph. Part of this "improvement" is revealed in the presence of more sophisticated cohesive devices. Sentence nine uses ellipsis: "You should" (exercise everyday). "Afterwards" (S10) and "After that" (S13) are examples of temporal conjunction. In sentence 11, we again have the ellipsis of "exercising" after "begin," and "ones" in the final sentence shows an appropriate use of nominal substitution for "pictures," a reasonable performance for a student who, when she started the paragraph, was only going through the motions.

Cohesion analysis, as long as it is not seen as a new panacea for poor student writing, can be of use in working with students on particular problems of style, logic, and order. When you first bring the notion of cohesion to your students' awareness, it is probably best to use some examples of their own successful writing to show them that already, at an unconscious level, they have mastered many of these "binding" techniques.

Another worthwhile activity is to send students out to gather snatches of oral discourse. What cohesive devices characterize speech? In what ways are the patterns of cohesion in written texts different? Further, in studying texts of the various authors you are reading, you might examine

individual approaches to cohesion to see in part what makes up an author's unique style.

The point is that we are surrounded by texts, so that any material can become an appropriate vehicle for cohesion analysis. And once your students are acquainted *informally* with the cohesion system, it should provide them with another means for locating problems in their own writing. Also it should make them more sensitive readers of the writing of others.

## Conclusion

Communication is perhaps the most complex of human behaviors. Writing or speaking so as to convey meaning, and reading or listening so as to receive meaning, require awareness of the functions of expectations, contexts and cohesive devices.

As you work with your students on the activities outlined in this pamphlet, your emphasis should be on *description*, not *prescription*. As English teachers our purpose is not to impose arbitrary rules: rather we should be trying to shake students out of their linguistic somnambulism by increasing their sensitivity to and mastery of language.

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